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ABSTRACT

The study explored 20 teachers' perceptions of the classroom behavior and work habits of 10 elementary-junior high school mainstreamed learning disabilities (LD) students and 10 nonlabeled control students. Results of the Devereux Elementary School Behavior Rating Scale and the rating of student behavior by an independent observer indicated that the classroom behavior of LD Ss differed very little from the behavior of their nonlabeled classmates. In addition, there was no evidence that the LD label biased the teachers' ratings. In fact, teachers rated nonlabeled Ss more harshly than LD Ss on several factors. (Author/CL)

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Is the Learning Disabilities Label a Biasing Factor in Teachers' Perceptions?

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Running Head: LD Label and Teacher Bias

Is the Learning Disability Label a

Biasing Factor in Teachers' Perceptions?

Ever since the advent of mainstreaming, special educators have complained that mainstream teachers are blinded by the handicap label and fail to perceive accurately student behavior and performance. Mainstream teachers, on the other hand, tell resource room teachers that the handicapped children are inattentive, break classroom rules, require constant teacher support to complete assignments, and are unable to keep up with their normal peers.

In 1973, Salvia, Clark and Ysseldyke showed that the educable mentally retarded (EMR) label produced negative ratings of observed pupil behaviors. In 1975, Foster, Ysseldyke and Reese showed that teacher trainees held negatively stereotypical expectations of children labeled emotionally disturbed (ED). Foster, Schmidt and Sabatino (1976) investigated the teacher expectancies created by the term "learning disabled" and concluded that the label generates negative expectancies in tea hers which affect their objective observations of child behavior and may be detrimental to the child's academic progress. Jacobs (1978) found that the learning disability label had an effect on classroom teachers' ability objectively to observe and interpret their behavior. In each of these studies the child was unknown to the subjects. Furthermore, the experimental subjects all viewed a videotape of a normal child and were misinformed that the child was handicapped.

Recent legislation has resulted in the mainstreaming of learning disabled students to many regular education classrooms. If increasing numbers of these students are to be integrated into regular education

classes, for even a portion of the school day, it is imperative that we know whether or not a teacher bias exists, and if it does exist, whether that bias is due to the label itself or to some characteristic that is associated with learning disabled students.

According to Myers and Hammell (1969), certain characteristics are associated with learning disabled students. These characteristics include a marked underachievement in school related activities; hyper or hypoactivity; motor incoordination; perseveration; disorders of perception and symbolization, distractibility and memory disorders. Learning disabled students very seldom evidence more than a few of these characteristics, and many of their nonlabelled peers in normal classrooms demonstrate one or two of them. When you consider the lack of agreement among doctors and educators on the criteria for identifying children with learning disabilities, it seems very possible that labelled learning disabled children may differ very little from their non-labelled peers. However, if learning disabled students <u>are</u> demonstrating these behaviors to any great extent in their mainstream classrooms, it is entirely likely that the teacher bias is due to the behavior and <u>not</u> to the label.

Method

The purpose of this study is to explore teachers' perceptions of the classroom behaviors and work habits of mainstreamed learning disabled students and their nonlabelled peers, and compare these perceptions to objective measures of those students' behaviors.

Student Subjects

The learning disabled (LD) subjects are five girls and five boys at the elementary level and five girls and five boys at the junior high level. They were randomly selected from the class lists of learning disabilities resource rooms in five schools in Montgomery County, Pennsylvania. All of the students are of normal intelligence as established by the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children - Revised.

The comparison students are five girls and five boys at the elementary level and five girls and five boys at the junior high level, all of whom are enrolled in regular education classes on a full time basis. Each comparison student is of the same sex as the LD child that teacher is rating and was randomly selected from the teacher's class list.

Teacher Subjects

The subjects are 20 certified public school teachers teaching in five schools operated by four separate school districts in Montgomery County. There are three reading; three mathematics; four social studies; four science; two art; two music and two physical education teachers.

The subjects were selected as follows: a 3" x 5" card was prepared for classes in which LD students were enrolled. This deck of cards was shuffled and the first class card drawn was assigned to the first LD student randomly selected from the class lists. The next class card drawn was assigned to the second student, etc. When a class card was drawn for a student who was taught that particular subject in the

resource room, rather than a regular classroom, the card was replaced in the deck and another card was drawn. Hence, if the card selected for a particular child was "reading," then that child's reading teacher was selected to rate the child.

Design

The experimental variables were arranged in a 2 x 2 x 2 factorial analysis of variance with repeated measures on one factor (type of child). The first variable, type of child, will consist of 1) learning disabled students and 2) non-labelled students. The second variable, sex, will consist of 1) boys and 2) girls, and the third variable, educational level, will consist of 1) elementary and 2) junior high levels.

The Scale

The Devereux Elementary School Behavior Rating Scale (DESB) (Spivack & Swift, 1967) was selected because it was standarized on populations similar to the five schools selected for this study. In addition, the instrument focuses on overt behaviors that occur frequently at both elementary and junior high levels, and on behaviors frequently demonstrated by learning disabled children.

This scale was reviewed by William M. Littell in 1971 who states that "a major strength of the DESB is the care with which the items were selected and grouped in the rating scale (p. 69)." A major flaw in the instrument lies in the fact that although intro-rater reliability of .87 is reported, no inter-rater reliability was reported. How-

ever, Littell recommended it as a sophistocated and "convenient tool in research, and as an aid in communication about the behavior through which a child meets or fails to meet the demands of the teacher (p. 69)." On that basis it was selected as the instrument for this study.

In a study by Spivack, Swift and Prewith (1971) the scale is described as follows:

> The DESB scale consists of 47 behavior items which the teacher rates either on the basis of frequency of occurrence ("How often does the child...initiate classroom discussion?") or on a seven-point scale indicating the degree of behavior ("To what degree is the child...unwilling to go back over his work?"). The complete scale, along with rating guide and scoring profile, was presented in the earlier report. The time to rate each child varies from 4 to 15 minutes, the average being 7 minutes. Each factor score is obtained through simple addition of the scores of the three or more items contributing to that behavior dimension. These factor scores comprised the raw data of the subsequent statistical analyses. The 11 factors studied were:
>
> 1. Classroom disturbance: Extent to which child teases and torments classmates, interferes with others' work, is quickly drawn into noise-making, and must be reprimanded or controlled.
> 2. Impatience: Extent to which child starts work too quickly, is sloppy and hasty in its performance, and is unwilling to review it.
> 3. Disrespect-defiance: Extent to which child speaks disrespectfully to teacher, resists doing what is asked of him, belittles the work being done, and breaks classroom rules.
> 4. External blame: Extent to which child says teacher does not help him or never calls on him, blames external circumstances when things do not go well for him, and is quick to say the work assigned is too hard.

5. Achievement anxiety: Extent to which child gets upset about test scores, worries about knowing the "right" answers, is overly anxious when tests are given, is sensitive to criticism or correction.

6. External reliance: Extent to which child gets upset about text scores, worries about knowing the "right" answers, is overly anxious when tests are given, is sensitive to criticism or correction.

7. Comprehension: Extent to which child gets the point of what is going on in class, seems able to apply what he has learned, and knows material when called upon to recite.

8. Inattentive-withdrawn: Extent to which child does not pay attention and seems oblivious of what is happening in the classroom, is preoccupied or difficult to reach.

9. Irrelevant responsiveness: Extent to which child tells exaggerated stories, gives irrelevant answers, interrupts when teacher is talking, and makes inappropriate comments.

10. Creative initiative: Extent to which child brings things to class that relate to current topics, talks about things in an interesting fashion, initiates classroom discussion, and introduces personal experiences into class discussion.

11. Need for closeness to teacher: Extent to which child seeks out the teacher before or after class, is friendly toward the teacher and offers to do things for her, and likes to be physically close to the teacher. (pp. 271-272)

Each teacher subject rated one LD and one comparison student of the same sex and from the same class, using the DESB as the test instrument. An independent observer, a graduate student with no information as to who is the learning disabled or non-labelled student, simultaneously rated the same LD and comparison student using the same instrument.

Procedure

The independent observer was trained in interval recording for two days prior to the study and established an inter-rater reliability

of 80% or more with the experimenter. This independent observer visited each classroom on three separate occasions to familiarize herself with the students and take interval recordings of their behavior.

The first 30 minutes of a 40 minute period was divided into 180 10-second intervals. For the first 10 seconds and every odd 10-second interval thereafter, she recorded the behavior of the LD student. During the second 10-seconds and every even numbered 10-second interval she observed and recorded the behavior of the normal comparison peer. The symbols which were used and which will represent item factors on the DESB are shown in Appendix A.

Observer reliability will be checked by graduate students trained in interval recording who simultaneously took independent measures of the children's behavior on two occasions in five of the classrooms.

The last 10 minutes of the observation was spent reviewing the written assignments, tests, etc. of both students. On the third observation the independent observer brought four copies of the DESB. After 30 minutes of interval recording she asked the teacher to rate the LD child and the comparison student 1) basing the rating on the student's behavior over the past three weeks; 2) comparing the students only to normal students of the same sex and age; 3) basing the rating only on the rater's personal experience with the student; 4) considering each question independently; 5) avoiding interpretations of "unconscious" motives and feelings; 6) using extreme ratings when-

ever warranted; 7) rating each item quickly; and 8) rating every item. The observer rated the students simultaneously using the same instrument. Hence, the teachers' ratings were based on the current and recent behavior of a child they had taught for several months, and the observer's ratings was based on a summary of the collected interval data and the two 10-minute reviews of the students' written assignments.

Results

The results at each educational level are presented separately in table form.

Table 1 provides the mean of the classroom teachers' and the mean of the independent observer's ratings of all elementary level L.D. girls, L.D. boys, non-labelled girls and non-labelled boys.

Insert Table 1 about here

Table 2 provides the same information for the junior high students.

Insert Table 2 about here

The findings indicated no significant difference in teachers' ratings of learning disabled and non-labelled children on seven of the eleven behavior factors. (Factors 1, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11).

Insert Table 3 about here

The observer's ratings also indicated no significant difference in the behaviors of L.D. and non-labelled children.

Insert Table 4 about here

Table 5, which compares the teachers' and the observer's ratings, indicates no significant difference in their ratings on most of the factors.

Insert Table 5 about here

However, going beyond the overall analysis of variance, analysis of variance for the simple effects showed that:

a. The discrepancy scores were significantly different ($p < .05$) at the elementary level between L.D. and non L.D. students for Factor 2 (Impatience), but were not significantly different at the secondary level.

Insert Figure 1 about here

b. The discrepancy scores were significantly different ($p < .05$) for secondary L.D. and non-labelled students for Factor 3 (Disrespect-Defiance), but of marginal significance at the elementary level ($.05 < p < .10$);

Insert Figure 2 about here

c. the discrepancy scores were significantly different ($p < .05$) at the elementary level for Factor 4 (External Blame) between L.D. and regular students, but not at the secondary level;

Insert Figure 3 about here

d. the discrepancy scores were not even of marginal significance between L.D. and regular students at both elementary and secondary levels for Factor 9 (Irrelevant Responsiveness), thus reflecting the fact that the overall interaction itself was weak.

Insert Figure 4 about here

DISCUSSION

This study attempted to determine 1) whether L.D. children behaved significantly differently from their non-labelled peers in mainstream classrooms; 2) whether teachers' ratings would accurately reflect the behavior of each group without any indication of bias toward the L.D. label; and 3) whether the interval recordings of the independent observer would support or contradict the teachers' ratings.

The data clearly indicated that the classroom behavior of learning disabled students in mainstream classrooms differs very little from the behavior of their non-labelled peers. Furthermore, there is no evidence that the learning disabilities label biased the teachers' ratings. As a matter of fact, teachers rated non-labelled students more negatively than labelled students on a number of factors.

However, teachers' ratings indicated that elementary school L.D. children demonstrate more impatience, disrespect-defiance and external blame than their non-labelled classmates. Although the teachers' ratings showed that Junior High non-labelled students demonstrated more impatience, disrespect-defiance, and external blame than their L.D. counterparts, the discrepancy was significant only for Factor 3.

What accounts for this decrease in overt demonstrations of impatience, disrespect-defiance and external blame by L.D. students? What accounts for the increase in overt demonstrations of the same factors by students never enrolled in L.D. programs? Are special educators, with their smaller classes, better able to focus on early indications of these behaviors and help their students find more appropriate ways of expressing their frustrations?

Unfortunately, length of exposure to L.D. programs was not a consideration in the selection of Junior High level L.D. students, nor were the L.D. teachers' reactions to impatience, disrespect-defiance or external blame explored. Those questions, therefore, cannot be answered here.

However, the results clearly exonerate the regular education teacher of any bias toward learning disabled students, and establishes that the behavior of L.D. children is very similar, indeed, to the behavior of their non-labelled classmates.

Table 1

Mean of Teacher & Observer Ratings of Elementary Students

Factor	Teacher Ratings				Observer Ratings			
	Boys		Girls		Boys		Girls	
	L.D.	Reg.	L.D.	Reg.	L.D.	Reg.	L.D.	Reg.
1.	12.6	9.6	11.4	6.0	20.2	19.8	41.8	16.0
2.	11.6	8.4	13.2	6.8	0	.2	.4	.2
3.	7.4	5.6	7.4	4.2	0	.0	.6	0
4.	10.0	7.0	9.8	5.0	0	.0	0	0
5.	12.4	11.2	11.2	7.6	.6	0	1.4	0
6.	16.2	12.2	17.8	12.2	7.2	.8	2.2	2.8
7.	11.8	15.4	10.8	14.6	11.4	8.2	6.2	5.4
8.	9.4	7.8	12.0	7.2	35.6	28.6	25.8	25.8
9.	8.4	6.4	9.4	5.4	.6	1.4	3.2	1.0
10.	12.6	15.8	12.6	13.0	0	.2	0	.4
11.	15.8	15.2	16.0	17.0	2.2	3.8	4.2	2.2

Table 2

Mean of Teacher & Observer Ratings of Junior H. S. Students

Factor	Teacher Ratings				Observer Ratings			
	Boys		Girls		Boys		Girls	
	L.D.	Reg.	L.D.	Reg.	L.D.	Reg.	L.D.	Reg.
1.	9.2	11.4	9.2	8.2	7.4	21.8	25.4	19.4
2.	10.2	14.8	9.2	10.0	0	0	0	1.4
3.	5.4	8.0	5.8	6.8	5.2	7.4	2.8	6.2
4.	5.8	8.4	6.4	7.2	5.8	8.2	6.4	7.2
5.	10.4	10.6	9.6	9.2	1.2	.6	.8	0
6.	16.4	14.0	16.8	12.0	3.6	5.2	1.4	6.4
7.	10.6	13.8	10.2	10.6	10.0	11.6	9.0	4.4
8.	11.2	10.8	11.6	10.2	38.6	38.4	24.0	49.2
9.	6.8	7.0	6.6	7.6	2.2	5.8	4.4	2.8
10.	9.6	10.4	6.6	6.6	9.6	9.0	6.6	6.4
11.	10.0	10.0	10.6	9.8	.4	0	.6	.4

Table 3

Summary Results of ANOVA by

Type, Sex & Level for Teacher's Ratings

Source of Effects	DESB Factors										
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Main Effects	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	.006	NS	NS	.001	.001
Type	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	.033	.005	NS	NS	NS	NS
Sex	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	.019	NS
Level	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	.052	NS	NS	.001	.001
2 Way Interactions	NS	.017	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS
Type x Sex	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS
Type x Level	NS	.006	.014	.025	NS	NS	NS	NS	.047	NS	NS
Sex x Level	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS
3 Way Interactions	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS
Type x Sex x Level	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS

Table 4

Summary Results of ANOVA by Type,

Sex & Level for Observers Ratings

Source of Effects	DESB Factors										
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Main Effects	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS
Type	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS
Sex	NS	.053	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS
Level	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	.019
2 Way Interactions	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS
Type x Sex	.053	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS
Type x Level	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS
Sex x Level	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS
3 Way Interactions	NS	.053	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS
Type x Sex x Level	NS	.053	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS

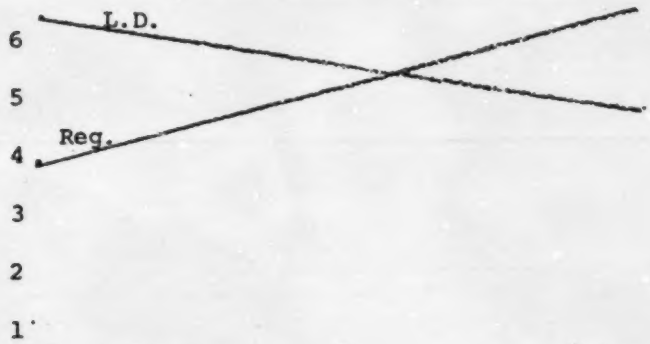
Table 5

Summary Results of ANOVA by Type, Sex & Level for Differences Between Teachers & Observers Ratings

Source of Effects	DESB Factors										
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Main Effects	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	.001	NS
Type	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS
Sex	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	.044	NS
Level	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	.001	.023
2 Way Interactions	NS	.025	.059	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS
Type x Sex	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS
Type x Level	NS	.015	.008	.027	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS
Sex x Level	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS
3 Way Interactions	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS
Type x Sex x Level	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS

Figure 1

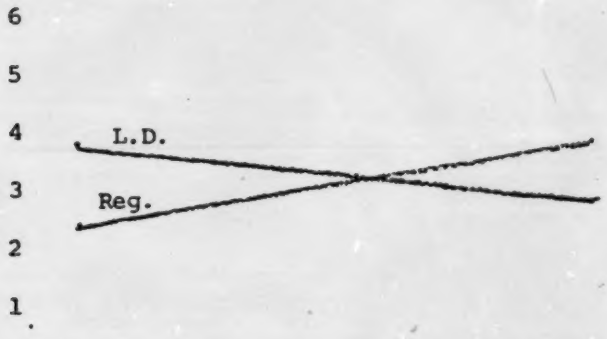
2 Way Interaction - Type x Level



Factor 2 - Impatience

Figure 2

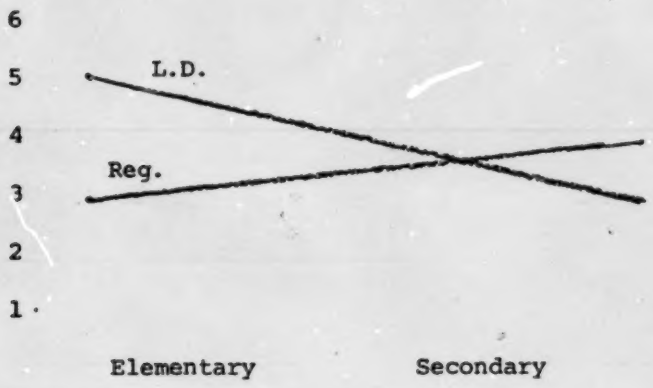
2 - Way Interaction - Type x Level



Factor 3 - Disrespect - Defiance

Figure 3

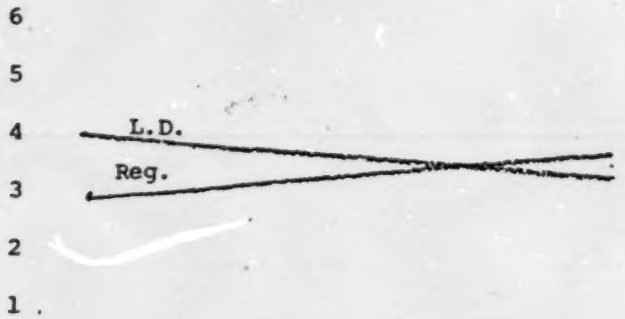
2 - Way Interaction - Type x Level



Factor 4 - External Blame

Figure 4

2 - Way Interaction - Type x Level



Factor 9 - Irrelevant Responsiveness

Appendix A

Symbols Representing Item Factors on the DESB

1. cd - Classroom Disturbance (Items 11, 12, 13, 30)
    a. Reprimanded or controlled by teacher
    b. Poke, torment, tease classmate
    c. Annoy, interfere with work of others
    d. Stop work to listen or join in noisemaking
2. im - Impatience (Items 1, 36, 44, 47)
    a. Starts work before understanding directions
    b. Sloppy - products are dirty, wrinkled
    c. Unwilling to go back over
    d. Rushes through making unnecessary errors
3. dd - Disrespect - Defiance (Items 5, 7, 9, 16)
    a. Speaks disrespectfully to teacher
    b. Defiant - will not do what teacher asks
    c. Belittles subject being taught
    d. Throws things, marks up desk or books
4. eb - External Blame (Items 2, 25, 34, 38)
    a. Says teacher never provides help
    b. Says teacher always calls on peers
    c. Blames teacher, test, others when things go wrong
    d. Says work is too hard
5. aa - Achievement Anxiety IItems 22, 23, 31, 33)
    a. Cries or is disturbed about test scores
    b. Shows worry or anxiety about incorrect answers
    c. Obviously nervous when test is given
    d. Sensitive to criticism or correction

6. er - External Reliance (Items 24, 29, 32, 42, 46)

   a. Looks to see what others are doing before beginning

   b. Reliant on teacher for directions before proceeding

   c. Unable to follow directions given to class

   d. Cannot decide between choice of two things

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